



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1400
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

Grayson Lookner
P.O. Box 8264
Portland, ME, 04104
Phone: (207) 200-3860
Grayson.Lookner@legislature.maine.gov

April 7, 2025

Testimony of Representative Grayson Lookner opposing
**LD 1351, An Act to Require Antisemitism to Be Considered as Motivation
When Determining a Violation of a Criminal or Civil Law**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

Good morning, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and esteemed members of the Joint Standing on the Committee on Judiciary. My name is Grayson Lookner, and I represent House District 113, which includes several neighborhoods in Portland. I'm here today to testify in opposition to **LD 1351, An Act to Require Antisemitism to Be Considered as Motivation When Determining a Violation of a Criminal or Civil Law.**

As a Jewish Mainer who grew up in rural communities where the word "Jew" was commonly used as a pejorative, I am sensitive to the sting of antisemitism. I've felt the rage and demoralization when swastikas appear on classmate's desks and on bathroom walls. My Jewish identity is central to my desire to work towards justice, which is encapsulated in the principle of "*tikkun olam*" or to repair the world. That's why I must speak against LD 1351 – because in adopting the IHRA definition, it weaponizes Jewish trauma to silence legitimate debate, making our pain into a cudgel against free speech.

I understand why many in my community view Israel as a lifeline. After centuries of persecution, the promise of safety through sovereignty resonates deeply – Israel represents survival. This deep-seated connection makes criticism of Israel feel like a threat – especially under Netanyahu's increasingly authoritarian government, which deliberately conflates Jewish identity with its political agenda.

But our safety does not exclude moral consistency or democratic principles. The IHRA definition, by equating criticism of Israel with antisemitism, exploits our trauma. It

deliberately blurs lines between attacking Jews and critiquing the policies of a government. We've seen the results: in the UK, Palestinian rights events canceled; in Canada, scholars censured. In the United States, entire universities have had their academic freedom undermined, and students who speak out have been illegally abducted and disappeared. This goes beyond chilling the freedom of discourse, it crushes it – all while doing little to reduce actual antisemitism.

In 2021, 66 Israeli academics pleaded with UK universities to reject this definition, recognizing how it *"inhibits free speech and academic freedom."* Over 600 Canadian scholars followed suit. Even initial supporters like Geoffrey Alderman now call it *"deeply flawed."* These aren't outsiders - they're our community members speaking hard truths.

To my fellow Jews who fear that opposing this bill endangers us: I know your fear, but do not share your conclusion. Our safety lies in solidarity, not silence; in community, not in tribalism, in moral clarity, not in legal definitions that skew our sense of what's right and what's wrong. When we allow criticism of Netanyahu's authoritarianism to be silenced as antisemitism, we betray both our values and our safety.

LD 1351 doesn't protect Jews – it exploits our trauma to suppress dissent. In casting Jews as the reason for suppressing free-speech, it only serves to increase real antisemitism. It makes our pain complicit in oppression. As someone who knows the taste of bigotry directed towards my Jewish heritage, I don't want my identity to be weaponized to undermine the constitutional rights of myself and others. Please vote this bill ought not to pass. Our dignity – and democracy – demand nothing less.